April 29, 2020

Senate President Pro Tempore Toni Atkins
Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon
Senator Hannah-Beth Jackson, Chair, Senate Standing Committee on Judiciary
Senator Scott Weiner, Chair, Senate Housing Committee
Assemblymember Mark Stone, Chair, Assembly Judiciary Committee
Assemblymember David Chiu, Chair, Assembly Housing & Community Development Committee

RE: Request for Suspension of the Costa-Hawkins Rental Housing Act

Dear California Legislative Leadership,

From the onset of this pandemic, we have commended the actions of our State government for taking early and decisive action to halt the spread of the novel coronavirus and flatten the curve. Now, as we look toward the long road to recovery, it is up to our collective leadership to build a path to healing for millions of working people, families, and our most vulnerable. A critical move we must take to respond to this emergency and begin our recovery is to suspend the Costa-Hawkins Rental Housing Act for the duration of the pandemic.

In Los Angeles, thousands of renters do not live in rent-stabilized housing and are at risk of a sudden rent increase from their landlords. Although Mayor Eric Garcetti has implemented a rent increase freeze for our City's rent-stabilized units, this does not apply to the thousands of tenants in non-rent stabilized housing. A fear that Costa-Hawkins prevents us from freezing rent increases on non-rent stabilized units, even during this extraordinary period, has kept Los Angeles from acting.

We have heard the stories of scores of constituents who, even before the onset of this pandemic, were living paycheck to paycheck and struggling to get by. Our own Los Angeles Homelessness Services Authority estimates that last year, 721,000 households in Los Angeles County were severely rent burdened, or spending more than half of household income on rent. Today, this grim picture is now unprecedented. A study from the University of Southern California estimates that more than half of Los Angeles County residents are now without a job. A report from the Los Angeles Economic Development Corporation predicts more than 2,816,700 jobs in Southern California will disappear by May. This will push unemployment far beyond levels seen during the Great Recession, and disproportionately impact immigrants, low-income residents, and communities of color.

There is only so much that rental assistance funds can do. We need emergency, statewide action to halt rent increases across the board while so many are out of work or seeing reduced pay. There's a lot of work to be done at every level of government to help people through this unprecedented time, but keeping people from facing rent hikes is the least we should be able to do.

We understand that there are ongoing negotiations regarding the impending Costa-Hawkins repeal ballot measure, and there are sensitive considerations on all sides of the argument. However, suspending Costa-Hawkins and allowing cities to protect their residents from rent increases is absolutely critical to confronting this crisis more directly and meeting the reality millions of people are facing.

Now is the time to suspend the Costa-Hawkins Rental Housing Act and ensure that California renters are able to stay safe and secure in their homes.

Sincerely,

Bob Blumenfield
Los Angeles City Councilmember, District 3

David E. Ryu
Los Angeles City Councilmember, District 4

Paul Koretz
Los Angeles City Councilmember, District 5

Mike Bonin
Los Angeles City Councilmember, District 11

Jose Huizar
Los Angeles City Councilmember, District 14

CC: Senator Bob Hertzberg, Senate Majority Leader
Senator Ben Allen
Senator Steven Bradford
Senator Maria Elena Durazo
Senator Holly Mitchell
Senator Anthony Portantino
Senator Henry Stern
Assemblymember Richard Bloom
Assemblymember Autumn Burke
Assemblymember Wendy Carrillo
Assemblymember Sydney Kamlager-Dove
Assemblymember Laura Friedman
Assemblymember Mike Gipson
Assemblymember Jesse Gabriel
Assemblymember Al Muratsuchi
Assemblymember Adrin Nazarian
Assemblymember Patrick O'Donnell
Assemblymember Luz Rivas
Assemblymember Miguel Santiago
Assemblymember Reginald Byron Jones-Sawyer, Sr.
Assemblymember Christy Smith